

## 2003 Volunteers in Natural Resources Banquet

Iowa Department of Natural Resources Director Jeff Vonk addressed the nominees and winners and had the DNR employees stand to applause. Project AWARE was the subject of the keynote presentation. Keepers of the Land awards were presented by the nominators to the winners of category. IOWATER presented its respective awards. Attached is a list of the Keepers of the Land award winners in category along with a brief synopsis of each nominee's work.

The Des Moines Register featured one of our nominees in the Project category: the Walnut Woods Bird Observation Blind in newspaper.



each

each

Large  
its

### 2003 Award Winners

#### Outstanding Individual Volunteer:

##### **Marlene Ehresman and Jim & Nancy Thalacker**

*This award is for an adult volunteer (19 or older) who stands out in terms of length of service, leadership, hours given, scope of work, recruitment of other volunteers, donations of equipment, money, supplies.*

Marlene Ehresman was nominated by Pat Schlarbaum, wildlife diversity technician at the Wildlife Research Station in Boone.

For over 20 years, Ehresman has worked with the Wildlife Care Clinic at Iowa State. "She is always available when assistance is required. From raptors to turtles she has worked with an amazing array of critters. Marlene is recognized as an office holder with National Wildlife Rehabilitates Association and regularly presents at its conventions," Schlarbaum said. "Recently a red-tailed hawk was discovered in downtown Des Moines and she was summoned to its aid...Marlene's dedication to natural resources includes those critter that have clashed with man-made structures or activities. Recently another incident occurred at Saylorville reservoir when a Pelican was tangled in some plastic. "Marlene's contributions to wildlife rehabilitation are awesome," Schlarbaum commented. "and as a wildlife educator at special day wildlife events, her expertise provides the public a powerful message of our role as participants in the environment."

The Thalackers were nominated by Matt Tschirgi, park manager at Pikes Peak State Park, for their service as campground hosts at the park for the past 11 years. They contributed over 2,000 hours of service each year. "Nancy has spent countless hours cleaning the restrooms and shower facilities, maintaining the flowers and hummingbird feeders, restocking brochures, and many other duties. She works long hours to keep things spotless and tidy and her work shows it," Tschirgi said in his nomination paper.

"Jim has spent countless hours working on various park projects," he said. His many projects range from landscaping and reseeding to designing and constructing camp pads, repairing trails, pouring concrete and grading roads. "In addition, Jim and Nancy are very helpful in recruiting other visitors, campers or youth groups to volunteer time at the park," commented Tschirgi. "They help recruit over 50 volunteers throughout each summer to help with various projects or tasks in the park...and they show appreciation for all the volunteers' help."

#### Outstanding Volunteer Group:

##### **Friends of the Mines of Spain**

*For those groups that stand out in terms of accomplishments over time, exceptional successes with recruitment and membership numbers, partnerships, sponsoring successful events.* Friends of the Mines of Spain was nominated by Wayne Buchholtz, park ranger.

"This group is a valuable source for the park in completing projects and educating the public," said Buchholtz. "Over the last seven years since its formation, the group of over 125 members has contributed thousands of hours each year.

"The group provides educational and interpretive programs to the public. Buchholtz said. "They assist in keeping the E. B. Lyons Center open and assist in trail construction, habitat improvement such as prairies and savannas, develop displays and exhibits and host the Mines of Spain Fall Seminar, summer and winter programs, Eaglewatch and more."

#### Outstanding Large Project:

##### **Backbone Lake Friends Group**

*For those projects that stand out in terms of scope of accomplishment; collaborative efforts between volunteers, partners and staff; a project with a large public impact; a project that would not have been possible without volunteers.*

David Sunne, park ranger at Backbone State Park, nominated this group. "Since the very beginning, the Backbone

Friends Group, has been a major asset to the park and the State of Iowa. Their first big project was to excavate 20 acres of Backbone Lake 10 feet deep in the winter of 1997-98. This project was completed totally with volunteers and contributions. The biggest contributor donated an estimated \$100,000 worth of his own equipment and labor!" Some of the many projects completed by this group include: cost-sharing two sedimentation ponds, purchasing and installing park benches, tree planting, brochure printing, and holding a fishing derby and Halloween Hike. This year they are paying 50% for a playground and its installation. "Most if not all of these improvements would not have happened without the efforts and financial support of this group," said Sunne. "Plus, because of them I have a much better understanding of the community's dependence on Backbone. The people of this community are economically and emotionally deeply committed to this park. Their wants and needs have been well represented through their representatives/members of the Backbone Lake Friends Group."

Outstanding Small Project:

**Kevin James and John Aaron Mertz**

*For those projects that stand out in terms of quality and detail; a project accomplished by an individual or small group of people; a project that was made easier because of the volunteer(s).*

Nominated by Pat Schlarbaum, "John Aaron Mertz with the leadership of Kevin James created a replica bald eagle nest for Red Rock Bald Eagle Appreciation Days in 2003," Schlarbaum said. Two thousand people appreciated the effort that created this replica nest. This unique environmental display will be enjoyed for many years to come. As an interpretive visual, the nest is stunning in its authenticity and scale. It even allows children the opportunity to sit in it and experience the world with truly a wildlife view. It's a wonderful display that promotes connections to our exceptional natural resources highlighted by our national symbol - the Bald Eagle." The project took over 100 hours to complete.

Outstanding Youth Volunteers:

**Justin Baugh, Brian Berndt, Travis Sherman**

*For an outstanding volunteer (18 or younger) who stands out in terms of length of service, hours given, leadership; recruitment of volunteers; scope of work; special project accomplishment.*

Travis Sherman was nominated by Mary Shea, park manager at Backbone State Park, Dundee. He earned his Eagle Scout award by roofing and painting the Bixby Shelter House at the park. He organized a group of six to do the work which took about two months and 100 hours of work. "The project may have saved the Bixby Shelter from the roof being removed completely," Shea said. "With DNR budgets as they are, this would have been a project that staff could not do."

Justin Baugh and Brian Berndt were nominated by Dennis Murphy, park manager of Wildcat Den, Muscatine. Both boys are members of Boy Scout Troop 26 of Blue Grass, and chose to do their Eagle Scout project at Wildcat Den. They organized their troop and repaired bridge railings and decking at the park. The improvements and repairs make the bridges safer for the public and saves the park staff time that they would have spent repairing them.

Outstanding DNR Staff Award:

**Ron Andrews**

*For DNR staff who work directly with volunteers and volunteer groups in the course of their work; length of time working with volunteers in programs/parks/projects (months/years); exceptional accomplishments working in conjunction with volunteers; value to the DNR's mission and to the citizens of Iowa.*

Ron Andrews was nominated by Bruce Ehresman. "Ron has particularly impacted habitat improvement and conservation education in Iowa," Ehresman said. "His latest gig, working with trumpeter swan restoration ... has had a huge impact on public attitude concerning the value of wetlands to wildlife and humans alike. Ron helped develop an outdoor classroom at Clear Lake and has worked closely with the youth in that town to increase their awareness of our more natural surroundings. He also instigated the forming of the Iowa State University Trumpeter Swan Committee, which has been an instrumental group in publishing a Trumpeter Swan Newsletter, doing fundraising for swan restoration and hosting a Spring Trumpeter Swan Banquet for several years, "On top of all this, Ron rarely says no to a speaking engagement, and he has given many hundreds of talks about wildlife to groups ranging from Garden Clubs to the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference to the North American Trumpeter Swan Society."

Director's Award:

**Boy Scout Troop 88, Ankeny Iowa**

*Director's personal choice from all the nominations*

Kim Olofson nominated Troop 88. "I have nick named Boy Scout Troop 88 the "prairie army" for their efforts in clearing brush from the Big Creek prairie," Olofson said. "They have worked on this endeavor over the last two years. They have also assisted with park cleanups and painting picnic tables. "If there is a group I can count on, it is Troop 88. They have always been there," he said. The troop brings 20 or more kids and adults to work on community service projects each time they come to the park.